

RADIO TRANSMUNDANE

Part Four

If you're already living
in a futuristic dystopian spy novel
why not be a covert operative?

>SOM
>INTRA-MISSION: TENEBRIS [STATUS CRITICAL]
>CODED WAVELENGTHS (M): 16~20, 42~114 [PARADOXICAL]
>BRIEF: EVADE CAPTURE, AWAIT INSTRUCTIONS
>ASSIGNED A-O: XXXX
>STATUS: IN PROGRESS
>DEBRIEFING:

It seemed like a good place to spring the trap, see what I was up against. It just so happened to be a library. Another library. There must be some hidden gravity to these places that keeps me in their orbit.

Anyway, I took a nice, isolated seat by a nice, big window, took out the laptop, and got to "work".

I got the distinct impression that no fewer than three Centrals were scoping me and my equipment so I grabbed my bag and went to the washroom. On the way out I suddenly "received a shocking text" and had to "leave immediately" and, oh yeah, forgot the computer. Oops.

I made it around the rectangular building, on the way spotting a shabby lookout in a bad brown suit slumped in the driver's seat of a dull grey sedan. As soon as I got to the front of the nice, big window I spotted all three numbskulls having a go at my peecce, right there in full view. They were completely engrossed in their work, and completely failed to notice me.

I got into my best panicked mode and turned back to hurriedly retrieve my "forgotten" hardware.

The lookout jumped in his seat when he spotted me coming back around the corner. For a moment I thought about memorizing the plate, make, and model but figured who'd be stupid enough to use a stake-out car again after it's been made?

At the back of the library my budget baby blue laptop was on the floor, the obvious yellow fabric zip cover tossed into a non-obvious corner nearby.

I picked up the computer, greatly "upset" that someone would treat my hardware like that, and did my best not to notice the loose screws and scratches that were undoubtedly the result of the laptop hitting the floor and not the other thing that I'd just seen.

I hoofed it back to the front of the library, adding what I hoped would come across as irritation to an already alarmed demeanor. But my acting skills were wasted. The car was no longer parked outside and the team had apparently vanished. But not for long and, along with their return, my earlier question received an answer.

I spotted the drab sedan again, thanks mostly to the other car being driven by one of the laptop trio. They kept making unsubtle hand gestures between cars and even rolled by each other a few times when they thought I couldn't see them.

This, precisely this, is why you never get a junior to do the job of an operative. Yikes!

Anyway, I made sure that whatever device they'd intended for me to carry around was always unimpeded and able to broadcast its position, maybe the things I typed, maybe even a fun video. Then I went on a creative tour of the city and freely enjoyed the rest of my day.

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He asked me what I thought of the place as he exited the shower-steamed bathroom, wrapped in a thick robe, towel-drying his hair.

"Impressive," I replied.

His new "toy" was indeed impressive; I'd never seen a private ship so big. We'd walked most of the spacious vessel, video-droned the rest in panoramic sweeps that made everything even more dramatic.

The ship had been some sort of decommissioned cargo or military ship and most of the accessible areas above deck were white-painted steel and porous grating. Very pragmatic, very not-luxury-yacht.

In fairness, it wasn't supposed to be a luxury yacht. The outside was an unapologetic construction, designed for hearty sea voyages, made to last. Looks were not up there on the original priority list.

Neither was the wood-lined dining room we were in, a semi-circular area with a pristine one-eighty degree view of the sea, perched at an elevated position behind the bow. Definitely the best view in the house, and definitely not part of the original design.

There were lots of little refurbishments all over the otherwise industrially cold vessel. Most of them seemed to me like silly ways to flaunt a newfound wealth but I smiled enthusiastically when he introduced them as being the result of many years of fervent planning and "strategic lottery play". I needed to reassure my new buddy, my ticket out of the country, that we were totally bros and, yeah, this was all fucking totally kick-ass.

An "affordable" skeleton crew kept it all running. I started to get some doubts about their abilities when, during a demonstration of a some genuinely exciting and cool micro-submersibles, one of them cut the lights to the launch room.

This was down in the lowest parts of the ship. A special chamber had been added from which the undersea scooters could be launched. They would emerge from beneath the hull to be piloted directly toward a spectacular school of fish, resplendent undersea corals, or an un-monitored shoreline.

The chamber had two charging stations occupied by scooters. Another submersible floated in the shallow pool over the sealed hull opening. This third scooter was "plausible deniability", according to my new friend. I was determined to put it to better use. Besides, I was sure he could afford a new way to avoid culpability before embarking on any capers.

In the meantime, we were looking out at the horizon from the new dining room. He was showered after our harrowing experience in the submersible chamber and asked me what I was drinking. So I started on rum while he went for Scotch.

Over the next few days we drank, played many hands of poker, ate crew-cooked Indonesian dishes, smoked cigars, and engaged in inane conversation. I had nothing to do but bide my time, then hide my crime.

When the submersible was eventually discovered missing I'm sure that his shifty crew made the top suspects list before I did. I'm confident about this because of the sequence of events that allowed me to take it and disembark as surreptitiously as I did.

That afternoon the ship was passing near some docks, the wooden kind to which you might tether small sailing boats and canoes. There were even some deck chairs with what seemed like people sitting on them, fishing gear and beer coolers nearby. As the ship plowed into them, for a few frantic moments a bunch of tipsy, strangely immobile old dudes were getting ripped to pieces.

Now, whether the captain was drunk, high, tired, or incredibly incompetent, I'll never know. Whatever the case, the result was that he steered the ship way too close to the docks, completely removing a large section with a slow-motion drift of crunching lumber and hollow metallic groans.

This was the first land we'd seen in days and I was trying to breathe in the tropical experience from the bow when this whole maritime demolition scene unfolded in front of me. The wreck sounded as awful as it looked but I found myself trying real hard to stifle my laughter.

Maybe it was the relief at discovering that the mangled bodies on the dock were actually just mannequins, weird, or maybe I was sort of glad that my host was getting some sort of karmic payback.

I suppose that the guy had been gracious enough to take me aboard his ship after buying my so-unbelievable-it-has-to-be-true cock and bull story back at that Dockside bar. But even then I detected the ostentatious odour of douchebag about him, a stink that only increased over time. The disinfecting nature of distilled spirits helped to mask the scent but unfortunately the offending source remained.

So in the end I felt few qualms about taking the underwater scooter.

Normally it would take two people to launch the micro-submersible, one to drive the sub and the other to operate the hatch. The ship's adventure through the docks had removed that requirement, either due to warping of the hull or tearing off of the outside seal. I didn't stick around to discover which theory was correct.

As I powered through the water astride the mini-sub, it looked to me like the ship was beginning to list to one side. I couldn't be sure due to the rear-looking distortion of the vehicle's glass canopy but I may have been witnessing the ship's last voyage.

Whatever. I was already underway to the next port of call.

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I ditched my ride in a commercial ship dock.

The place is scaled for massive cargo ships so getting in or out of the water there's a bitch, impossible in most spots without some sort of climbing equipment. But it's got fewer eyes, fewer people to contend with, more ways to get past security.

Getting through the fencing and yards was pretty easy but the outer buildings and security needed some deft SSA.

Judging by the night-time heat, the clinging humidity, and the signage I spotted on my way out, I was in [REDACTED]. The kingdom would not look kindly on an undocumented foreign trespasser; I'd seen the prisons, didn't like 'em.

[REDACTED] was supposed to have been a stop-over on the itinerary of my ill-fated ocean ferry. Now it would be the city I'd have to slip through like a shadow, undetected and unsuspected.

I'd been in [REDACTED] before, but only for a sparse handful of days and usually as a stopover to other destinations, so while I had a general feel for the layout of the sprawling metropolis I had no details to rely on.

I decided that travelling north along one of the [] [] river tributaries would be the safest way to travel. The long water taxi is a controlled environment carrying a limited number of people within close proximity. It's also farther from spotters on the shore than a bus is from spotters on the sidewalk. I knew it wasn't a guarantee but I was trying to maximize my chances.

But it was already evening and I was no shape to start the journey so I made my way to a nearby temple that fed and housed the homeless. The Goddess of Mercy looked over us as we slept.

That night I had an intensely vivid dream. I was in the same temple except that it was now an old ruin with only some angular stone protrusions sticking out of the ground where the walls had been. Instead of the statue of Quan Yin there stood a stately Bodhi tree and under it sat a Buddhist monk, bald head, prayer beads, draped robe, the whole get-up.

He picked up one of the Bodhi leaves and wrote something on it in pen. He asked me for a donation in exchange for the leaf and its "answers". I wasn't sure what the questions were but I was curious so I handed him the change in my pocket.

He handed me the leaf which in my dream logic I immediately stuck between the pages of a travel journal I was carrying. We got to talking and I remember something about "the threefold path of the burning heart" but not much else.

Anyway, the dream ended when he reached out and took my head in his hands, tilted it about forty-five degrees to the left, and said, "Now you must take it in your own hands".

Early the next day we were given breakfast, water taxi chits, and a blessing from the temple priests before hitting the streets.

I immediately made my way back to the water and got onboard the first north-bound taxi that accepted the chit.

Shortly after setting off, the passengers began to turn to their neighbours to chat. Experience said that the best way to blend in is not to stick out like a sore thumb, so I looked over at the man seated across from me, at least to acknowledge his presence.

He looked up from the newspaper he was reading and tilted up the brim of his ball cap. It was the monk from my dream.

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Actually he wasn't a Buddhist monk at all but a repair man. He was also bald but assured me that this was strictly a matter of grooming convenience. I tried to pronounce his native name and after numerous failures he asked me to just call him Sam. Sam the elevator repair man.

I learned that due to the surprising demand for someone with his experience, Sam picked up his impeccable English solely as a result of his extensive travels, which was great because my [REDACTED] was rubbish.

We chatted at length about the the places he'd visited, places he'd tour again, and places he was itching to see. We talked about the resurgence in certain skilled trades and how they were becoming respectable again. We debated great international foods and where to find their best renditions. We debated the pitfalls of North American consumerism, the rise of global hegemony, and the disappearance of idealism. We talked about the weather.

In short, we shot the shit.

Sam was laid-back and seemed content with his life. Other than the few critiques of Western decadence he had little to say that was negative, and even that was laced with a sort of nonchalant hope that things would improve.

He was married, had two kids, lived right here in [REDACTED], had never been a monk but for him, like most people in this part of the world, the daily sight of the Buddhist brotherhood with their bright orange vestments, wooden beads, and tin alms bowls was common. When they show up in your dreams you're supposed to pay attention.

Like we all were, Sam was feeling the intensified heat of the sun as it reflected off the waters of the river. He reached up with both hands to wipe the sweat off of his head when he froze.

Hands stuck halfway through the motion, he tilted his head to the side to gaze intensely at something over my shoulder. Suddenly his eyes widened as his left hand shot out, violently grabbing my arm and pulling me over.

I remember the pop of the rifle and the whiz of the bullet going by my ear but I'm still not sure in which order those things happened.

Sam's initial reaction had saved me but lying prone on the floor of the boat I could see by his pleading eyes that he was out of moves. Now it was my turn.

I would've like more time to look around to see exactly who had taken the shot but the passengers were all scrambling and screaming so we were obliged to follow. We just did it with less noise and more SSA.

As Sam and me swam away from the boat I took a quick couple of peeks back. The would-be-assassin had long since taken off, a sensible thing to do given the commotion they'd produced. And yes, would-be-assassin, because the height of the bullet's exit hole in the wooden guard rail suggested that the entry would've been at the back of my head and maybe the front of Sam's.

We swam to shore and Sam got us to a shady, secluded temple where we laid out our stuff to dry and settled down for the inevitable chat.

"Sam," I said, "I think you need to know something."

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I spilled on Sam. Told him about the org, what it does, how I think the it got infiltrated, and who was most likely behind it. I told him of my escape via Dockside and the over-under-sea passage to his city's shores.

As I expected, he was irritated and highly incredulous.

First off, the shock was slowly giving way to anger, so that didn't help. Second, the existence of the org is a hard pill to swallow under the best of conditions. Luckily, gunfire can make such a yarn somewhat more believable. And third, there was his family, the two daughters and wife. Understandable.

For a moment he questioned if maybe the bullet had been meant for him, some sort of karmic payback, for what he couldn't say, but I assured him that shooting *through* another person is a really unreliable way to take out a target. The bullet had been meant for me, anyone else that got a piece of it would've just been unlucky.

I completely expected him to split after that. Instead, he told me about a dream he'd had the night before.

In it, he was sitting at the front of a water taxi, not unlike the one we'd recently escaped from. This was one's front half was enclosed by a vaulted

canopy made out of a large tarp, a corner of which was raised where he was sitting so that he could watch the passing scenery.

The water taxi was moving slowly through some sort of close-quarters canal where the embankments were within inches on either side of the boat. It's because of this close proximity that he was able to spot a yellow bag and a baby blue laptop computer lying on the bank next to him, seemingly abandoned.

He felt the need to grab it but decided to look over the sharply descending hill to see if the computer might have an owner.

He spotted a group of teens at the bottom of the steep incline, half of them dressed in bright yellow jerseys, half in pitch black. They seemed to be playing soccer and had haphazardly dropped their belongings nearby.

That's when his boat passed by another bag with a tablet computer propped up against it and he suddenly felt a need to put back the laptop and grab the tablet instead. Why did he do this? Dream spontaneity, he guessed.

He turned on the tablet and it booted up. He instantly noticed a somewhat stark and possibly menacing design on the operating system's desktop. This, he said, he knew he had to keep secret. How did he know this? "How do you know anything in dreams?" he replied.

I asked him to hang on a bit while I finger-traced a symbol for him on the dusty floor of the temple; the standard circle-triangle-rose-eye-in-hand-skull insignia. Was this it, by any chance?

He examined it, swallowed real hard, and assumed the look of a man who had just seen a ghost. Yeah he said. And what's more, he then used the tablet to take a photo of the interior of the boat. The flash of the tablet's camera temporarily blinded the armed assailant that had just burst onto the vessel.

He remembered the man raising his gun and screaming for someone's money just before he woke up.

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So I'd confirmed Sam's bona fides and he, in turn, was doing that astonished jaw-drop thing that new recruits do when the luxury of a years-long anamnesis can't be afforded.

I can still see it now: eyes darting from side to side, face beaming with ferocious intensity, muttering to himself and gesticulating madly. The look of astounded recognition is something I don't think I'll ever tire of.

So now there were two of us.

Eventually we arrived at the conclusion that in the immediate moment he was supposed to be our ticket to a new safe house. He knew just the place, of course, and the wife and kids should be very safe — his cover had been very deep — and travel was what he did regularly, which now made so much more sense.

We immediately got dressed and started on our way to the safe house, quietly swinging by his residence to pick up some necessities.

This safe house ended up being a wonderfully dark and dank corrugated corner of a small, semicircular air hangar that had been converted into a religious trinkets market for "off-path" tourists. It had been covered over with sand to give it a more "authentic desert market look" and it was decorated with just

the right amount of sketch to attract the more adventurous travellers. Fools and their worldly possessions.

The place suited me just fine; plenty of side exits, lots of friendly eyes, nice incense burning. The market could get rowdy with private after-hours booze and gambling, but in the times when it would irritate me I also forgave because it provided so many hazily happy moments. Me and poker, you know?

Sam wasn't scheduled to travel again for a couple of days so he went back home to be with his family and maintain cover. Meanwhile I'd figure out next steps.

The night before we were set to depart we'd been made.

Whether this was the same shooter or some entirely different guy I couldn't say but that really didn't seem important at the time. He'd marched into the hangar, a Smith & Wesson Model 500 cannon in each extended hand, cold killer intent demanding to see the "Transmundane man".

The sellers all froze for a moment and then, simultaneously took off in a choreographed synchrony in separate directions. The shooter just stood there, stunned, unsure who to target.

Sam had been practising some rudimentary SSA and my itch to leave meant that I was ready so, in the pandemonium we were able to slip out unnoticed with relative ease.

He gave me an airline ticket and we split up. With the help of an old friend he was going to go home to make his family vanish. Obviously, if he'd led the assassin to our location he would also know where his family were, so he wasn't wasting any time.

In the meantime I would fly to our destination and wait for him, doing whatever prep work I could.

So far we'd been on the back foot. I was determined that now things were going to be different.

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Okay, so, continuing on.

Sam, you know already.

R is a girl I met years ago. My handler contacted hers and we "accidentally" crossed paths in the underground. Instant connection, she was cute and fit in that petite, condensed woman sort of way, bright, outgoing, dedicated, all in on Transmundane, and me.

So all three of us are holed up in the rural safe house north-east of the city; Sam, R, and me.

And we're awaiting our doom.

What we had in fact done was to leave a trail of breadcrumbs for Central to follow. We were hoping it was obvious enough but sufficiently unobvious to look legit. It's a tough balancing act.

But if it worked, their chief bloodhound would be arriving any minute and he'd probably be accompanied by some prehistoric-looking goons and way more weapons than the zero we had. Unless you count forks or rickety chairs.

Here's what I was afraid of:

Suddenly there's a loud smash as the front door comes flying into the kitchen, pieces of splintered wood spinning wildly outward as black-clad, heavily armed, and heavily shielded troops come crashing through.

A split second later, the kitchen windows explode as more troops come barreling through, but by that time it's too late to react because the first squad has already opened fire, ripping us to pieces in a barrage of hollow-point hell.

The end.

Yeah, not a good scenario. So what else?

Right, the lighthouse!

See, there's this lighthouse in the backyard of this house. It's only like three stories tall, like a novelty sorta thing. But it's a real working lighthouse.

It goes along with the nautical theme of the main house, white with blue trim, wooden mermaid posted on the north side, steering wheel on the south, wooden deck with an outdoor Jacuzzi out east. The variety of aquatic gear and memorabilia in the basement really underlines the whole thing, you know? Owner really fucking loves boats.

Anyway, the lighthouse seemed like the most obvious choice. It's where the spare gas canisters were kept and there was bound to be plenty of juice to make a nice big spark.

I assumed.

I hadn't been in there for years so I couldn't be sure but I was drawing blanks at that point. I didn't have keys to the place and I had no idea where they

might be so we'd need to pry the locked door, and that would eat up precious time. If the lighthouse didn't pan out, and we got the opportunity, there was always a mad dash through open farm fields behind the two-acre property. But we were determined to avoid that option.

Well, we lucked out.

Not only was there plenty of gas, there was also lots of other hardware and pointy metal things that we ended up MacGyvering into some pretty nasty projectiles.

I figured our guests would be using a variety of equipment to detect our exact location anywhere on the premises so the best plan would be to stand right about in the middle of the first floor, hiding in in plain sight, just chillin'.

I gotta tell you, it was like a ballet. Those cocksuckers came through every door and window. Most of them were wearing combo mag/IR goggles, had multiple sidearms, full body armor, fully automatic rifles, and a few had these ridiculously massive scopes. Probably long-range snipers. I guess they needed everyone on the team to cover every window simultaneously.

Sam pulled the ripcord, triggering the pulley mechanism and and sending us down through the floor into the tunnel. We hit the metal contact plates as planned. Real basic electrical circuit, nothing fancy, but relatively foolproof. Place went up in what must've been a spectacular fireball.

We'd rigged the place to fuck up everything inside, an inferno of flying hot steel and scorched death. It sounded pretty brutal when it went off. I mean, they were firing the moment they came through the glass so it was hard to feel much remorse but still...

In the meantime, we were relatively safe down in the tunnel which wasn't made for escapes, just to supply the lighthouse with water. The owner told me all about it during his daily litany of complaints about having to maintain a rural house. When he got tired of paying for excavators to come replace the pipes every time a gopher or rabbit or some other thing messed them up, he had a stone tunnel built around the pipes to make it easier to repair and inspect them. It was a cramped space, hands and knees only, but it was enough.

Had a scare when a couple of the Central assault team fell into the tunnel behind us, fully engulfed in flames. Of course we didn't check to see if they were actually dead but they didn't seem to be moving. Good enough for me.

We crawled through that tunnel and to the well opening, kicked that through, and then scuttered our way up the well.

I held up the well cover while Sam and R peeked out.

"What are you seeing?" I remember asking.

I also distinctly remember the answer. It was, "three guns pointed at us."

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The "enhanced interrogation" consisted of retribution for answers they didn't like or didn't like enough, using whatever they could get their hands on.

Luckily, through the blast we'd managed to make the farming and grounds maintenance equipment unusable but unfortunately, the house still had plenty to work with.

So there was the usual violence, threats, profanity, and explanations of how they would further hurt, threaten, and denigrate us before throwing us "in the hole."

They were freaked out. Wanted to know how we knew they were coming, where we got this information from, and so on.

R and me were able to quickly sink into an altered state, disconnected from our bodies and their discomforts, so violence and threats didn't mean much.

Unfortunately, Sam had very limited time with this type of NRT training so he really didn't enjoy himself. I'm sure it made a compelling case for the expansion of his education but it wasn't a good time to discuss the topic.

Eventually the two Central goons and their Commander started to get frustrated. Sam genuinely had very little to give them that they would believe, and R and me were unfazed by the blood pouring out of our head wounds and bodily lacerations.

Suddenly, R's eyes rolled back into her head and she went into violent, full-body convulsions.

I wasn't sure if the seizure was genuine or a diversion but I decided to take advantage of it either way.

I quickly moved my internal focus to just above my kidneys to my adrenal glands, coaxing them into giving me a brief boost. With a small hop I was able to land the chair on a slight angle, enough to crack the legs and back which allowed me to free my arms.

The Commander was sitting and had placed his gun on the table in front of him after the pistol-whipping he'd just tuckered himself out with. Between the adrenaline boost, the diversion, and the SSA it was a simple matter to snatch it and take him out.

I caught the Commander in the head and managed to hit one of the goons in the neck before they had a chance to pull on me. The third one ducked before I could get off another shot.

He decided to beat a retreat and ran out of the house while firing off blindly behind him. By the bullet holes I was able to spot in the immediate aftermath, almost every shot ended up either in the wall, ceiling, or floor.

R was out and had some red froth at her mouth. At first I was afraid she'd gotten shot but it turned out she'd just bitten her tongue. She wasn't acting.

Sam moaned and groaned, understandably.

As for me, I had a big gash on the head, another on my leg, a missing tooth, and lots of little cuts and puffy bruises.

However, we were all going to live.

In an interesting twist, for a while it seemed like the Commander would too.

My shot had taken off half of his skull, exposing his brain. The bone was just hanging there, connected to the rest of the head by a big bloody flap of skin and hair. You could see where the bullet had exited, the hole now oozing red syrupy blood into an expanding puddle on the floor. Bits of brain, hair, and skull were stuck to the blood spray on the wall behind.

In the movies they make it seem like a head shot is instant death but in some cases it isn't. Like in this case.

The Commander was twitching and snarling like a rabid dog. His face was so distorted it didn't even look human, more demonic. The eyes were moving independently and his limbs were straining into these crazy angles. This must be what unchecked rage and hate looks like. Seriously fucked up to watch.

Between the snarls and grunts he managed to get out a few words about murdering us and violating our mothers. Eventually I dragged in an area rug from the living room and rolled him up in it. I wasn't going to put up with any raging zombie shit.

I freed Sam and R, who was starting to come around again. By this time the carpet roll had gone quiet and even the crackle of the lighthouse's flames was no longer audible. It looked like our immediate threat had been fully neutralized.

We cleaned up as best as we could, ransacked the all-black Hummers which we found parked down the road, and left the area via an Uber that picked us up even farther down the road to avoid any questions.

So we'd managed to take out an entire assault team and now we had some of their equipment. We were taking a chance when we assumed that almost the entire assault team would be used to take the lighthouse but the plan ended up working to perfection, except maybe the beatings.

Before we left I pinned a note on the rolled up carpet near the Commander's still-disfigured face for the Central mop-up crew. It read something like:

"Dear Authority, if you wish to keep following us we could always use more equipment. Sorry about the assault team but they were a bunch of hotheads anyway. With love, three measly Transmundane ops."

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Having learned I'd taken all three, someone once asked me what the difference between mushrooms, LSD, and Salvia was since they were all classified as hallucinogens.

I told them that for me, acid trips bend the fabric of reality and Salvia shatters it. In both cases, only my perceptions of the world are affected. But hallucinogenic mushrooms are unique in that whenever I step into their dimension I seem to come back with a physical souvenir or two.

So when my handler straight up told me that 'shrooms needed to be part of my mission, I both understood and was glad to have a history with them.

We spent the day preparing by running over the plan and executing the executable parts, clearing our minds, running RV intel, filing requisitions, and starting again from the beginning. By sunset, the plan and the tactical thaumaturgy were drilled deep into our heads where they could be wielded like reflex.

I was finishing munching the last few stocks left in the plastic baggie as we pulled up to the rail yard. I was pleasantly surprised at the mild flavour of the mushrooms, unusual in my experiences with the thin blue brethren. It was an auspicious start.

Sam was at the wheel and R was in the back seat operating remote comms, which is fancy talk for a headset and a laptop with an internet connection. I was wearing a coat with a hole in the place of a breast button behind which was a cell phone, live-streaming the mission to R. In my pocket I also had a coiled USB cable and a small Bluetooth earpiece for communicating with her, to be worn only if absolutely necessary.

I was nervous, of course. Shitting my pants, if we're being entirely honest. The whole thing was batshit crazy but the more we thought about it, the more brilliant it seemed. However, knowing all of the bullet points in favour of the plan didn't really help right then and there; I was still walking alone into a Central compound, high on magic mushrooms, only a hazy idea of what I was looking for and no ideas regarding how I would access it once I found it.

I stumbled forward through the darkness between warehouses. Moon was too low and artificial light would be too risky so I simply had to move slow.

Eventually, I stumbled out onto a dimly lit stretch of tracks on which stood two boxcars. The mushroom dimension had already draped itself over reality somewhere back there and I stepped out from the black tunnel of shadows into the playful, magical, Mycorrhizal dimension.

And right there, in the middle of this world stood a timid Golden Retriever with a head on each end of its body. An immense calm washed over me, a certainty that I knew this dog and that it would get me through the challenges ahead. This was definitely a first for me, but when in Rome...

As I approached the strange animal it cowered and ran across the tracks, disappearing behind the far boxcar. A few moments later it reappeared on top of the car, staring intently at me with all four eyes.

I decided that this must be my cue so I followed. When I got to the top of the boxcar the dog was waiting for me. This time it didn't run and actually seemed eager for me to approach.

But our love-in was abruptly broken up when the dog seemed to remember its purpose, rising suddenly from its playful crouch and somehow climbing down the side of the train in a way that my brain wasn't allowing me to understand. I knew that in this state the best thing to do is just accept it and move on. So I followed once again and soon the dog was leading me between, under, over, and through train cars, masterfully dodging security and surveillance.

A number of times, after leading me to shadowy hiding places, the dog would stand in full view and gaze sternly at things it wanted me to pay attention to, like the security and the surveillance.

If I moved too soon, both heads would turn to look at me with that same stern expression. When it was time to go the dog would start to jump around, both heads panting happily.

So I made my way undetected through the yard until I got to a long and surprisingly tall train car covered in glistening ripples of *something*. The dog darted toward the shimmering car and disappeared into its shadows.

Hoping that the canine knew what it was doing, I headed for the same car. As I got closer the glistening and shimmering resolved themselves into a wall of fruit, fruity gummies, fruity cereals, fruity candies, fruity cakes, and, well, you get the general theme. And everything was fragrant and inviting, just hanging there somehow.

I leaned toward a conveniently close mango slice and took a bite. It was absolutely delicious. I didn't really care how "real" it was, it was that good.

Turned out later that at that point the video from the button cam would only show a black screen with an occasional clunking sound in the audio. Even more interestingly, my in-person experience of a few seconds ate up over five minutes of the recording.

So as I was standing there enjoying this phantom fruit, the two-headed dog reappeared at the far end of the tall train car, beckoning me to follow. As I turned the corner of the car I suddenly experienced what I can only describe as a fold in reality. It's as if the corner was projecting some sort of plane or membrane that, as I stepped through, transported me to a completely different location in the train yard. To be exact, I turned the corner, reality sort of *rotated*, and I found myself facing a Central security goon guarding an open train car.

Once again, the video recording of my membranous trip was completely black but this time for only about two minutes and with absolutely no audio. Just blank.

To me the whole thing felt natural and seamless so I just went with it and focused on what was obviously the target in front of me. What else would fit the description of a highly secure train car full of active server racks? As unlikely as the remote viewing intel had seemed, this was indeed a Central mobile SIGINT station, no doubt about it.

Now I'd simply have to make my way past the guard on this side of the car and out the other, stopping off to copy Central's current private encryption keys and install a custom-written backdoor.

I instinctively pulled out the Agent-Operative's standard primary weapon. To my mild surprise, the guard smiled back.

>EOM

>SOM
>INTRA-MISSION: TENEBRIS [STATUS CRITICAL]
>CODED WAVELENGTHS (M): 16~20, 42~114 [PARADOXICAL]
>BRIEF: EVADE CAPTURE, AWAIT INSTRUCTIONS
>ASSIGNED A-0: XXXX
>STATUS: IN PROGRESS
>DEBRIEFING:

At this point I remember launching into a conversation with the guard about inane things. I suppose in other circumstances it would seem weird to be approached by a stranger on train tracks in the middle of the night as you're guarding highly sensitive equipment but this didn't seem to bother the sentry in the slightest. In fact, he was very happy to discuss the weather, his job, and his plans for the weekend.

The video recording would later show him looking more or less like a zombie, mouthing some words but not making any sound despite the fact that ambient noises in the yard can clearly be heard. Most of my part of the conversation was similarly missing except for about half a second at the beginning where I mumbled something unintelligible.

Of course, there are many mundane explanations for how the video and audio anomalies could've happened and the guard could've been NLP'ed into becoming my on-the-spot friend. Or I could've used an old mesmeric technique. Modern hypnosis has a few tricks too. It was late. He was probably tired. None of it needed to be especially supernatural to work. Except that's not how I remember it going down. But then again, I was pretty high.

I do, however, have corroborating video evidence of the guard then saying, "come on in, sir," helpfully reaching behind him to punch a code into the

console on the train car, and deactivating the silent security system that would've had backup there in seconds. Cutbacks, the guard had somehow explained, meant that he was the only one actively guarding the car most of the time and it was also why the door was open - the cooling systems gobbled up a significant amount of fuel and hence money, fans and natural ventilation much less so.

I was free to roam for as long as the effect on the guard held so I plugged the USB cable into about a dozen blade servers, anything that had an input terminal. My phone was on the other end of the cable and thankfully the mushrooms didn't seem to affect my rudimentary Unix skills. I made multiple installations of the Trojan and copied as many encryption keys as I could find.

As soon as I started to feel spooked about how long I was spending there I put everything into my pocket and headed out another door. I snuck across a short length of the yard through the shadows and exited onto the street through rusty gates.

Immediately to my left there was a commotion; Sam was following R in a disturbingly menacing manner while she screamed hysterically for help. The two guards had left their post at the gates to thwart the "attack" in progress, allowing me to slip by and across the street.

As soon as they saw that I had made it out, Sam and R instantly became indignant that the guards were interfering in their "game" and demanded that they mind their own *fucking* business. In my opinion, it was R's priceless delivery that really sealed the deal.

A few choice words later, the irate guards returned to their post and the three of us converged on my GPS location as planned, hopped in the car, and drove off.

Mission done.

R laughed victoriously in the back seat with each new discovery she made on Central's systems, thanks to the newly-installed backdoor. Sam had the radio on some pop station, tapping his hands to the beat on the steering wheel, rhythmically bobbing his smiling face up and down. I was up front, still pretty high, watching the streetlights leaving long tracers behind as we rolled jubilantly down the streets. I remember wondering if this is what it's like to see through time.

Then, suddenly, something in me realized that I was holding something. I opened up my hand and there was a USB thumb drive sitting there. I must've swiped it during my romp through the mobile surveillance train, but for the life of me I couldn't remember where or when. Total blank. A psychedelic souvenir, I guess.

>EOM